Treating identity as critical infrastructure

Agencies can deliver better user experiences by modernizing their approach to identity and access management

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Identity is a fundamental element of both the user experience and security, and agencies should think of it as critical infrastructure. For example, a bridge or a roadway that is decades old likely needs to be repaired to function properly or perhaps modernized to accommodate higher volumes of traffic. Identity and access management is similarly ripe for modernization.

Agencies can assess the state of their identity infrastructure by continually asking whether they are delivering the right capabilities to their employees, the public and other customers and whether they are doing so in a way that matches how people live and work today. We all have high expectations for capabilities and usability because of our daily interactions with smartphones. We're used to conducting our business quickly and efficiently, and agencies should likewise be building enterprise systems that support the fast and efficient delivery of government services.

Furthermore, agencies should build those systems with a line of sight to the future. One way to do that is by adopting technology based on open standards, which gives agencies the ability to be more agile and avoid locking themselves into technology that will be expensive to maintain and expensive to replace when the time comes.

The security vs. productivity conundrum

Great user experiences cannot happen without robust cybersecurity. Delivering the best capability for users while providing strong, seamless security is the conundrum that we practitioners wrestle with everyday. That's another area where open standards can help. For example, the FIDO Alliance is a consortium of technology partners and customers that are defining open standards for identity management. The Apples and Googles of the world are using these standards, so we might as well adopt them in the government world, too, because that helps us accelerate ease of use. It also helps us accelerate security.

In addition, the move to cloud computing and mobile devices over the past decade has made Zero Trust inevitable. It's something that will happen either with you or to you, and we would all prefer to have it happen with us. The need to continually verify users and access goes back to the notion that identity is critical infrastructure because identity facilitates digital access and also because attackers use identity as a way to break into IT systems. Although attackers are ultimately after data, most breaches target identity systems because they offer a way into apps and then into the data.

Choosing the right cloud service providers

Cloud adoption accelerated during the pandemic and will continue to grow. Most agencies will pursue a

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hybrid model because not everything needs to live on the cloud, although digital identities should be stored and managed in the cloud for the security and flexibility it offers.

Choosing the right cloud service providers means finding experts who are invested in creating topnotch user experiences and building strong security architectures. Okta is FedRAMP-authorized and has a network of 7,000 technology partners, including ones that support three layers of protection to fast-track Zero Trust implementation. Okta, CrowdStrike and Zscaler are best-in-class security leaders in our respective fields, and when our technologies are implemented together, they enable agencies to address three of the five pillars in the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency’s Zero Trust Maturity Model: identity, device and network/environment.

By thinking of identity as critical infrastructure and leveraging modern cloud services, agencies can create a secure, agile, scalable IT infrastructure that delivers frictionless, highly satisfying user experiences. ■

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